United Nations E/AC.51/2007/2/Add.3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 March 2007

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-seventh session
11 June-6 July 2007
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: decolonization and question of Palestine

Summary

At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. The first report on subprogramme 1, Prevention, control and resolution of conflicts of programme 2 of the biennial programme plan for 2006-2007 was presented to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006 (E/AC.51/2006/4). This evaluation is part of the second phase of the in-depth evaluation and covers subprogramme 4, Decolonization, and subprogramme 5, Question of Palestine. It focuses on the structure, activities and products of both the Decolonization Unit, responsible for implementing subprogramme 4, and the Division for Palestinian Rights, responsible for implementing subprogramme 5.

Given the political, social, economic, and environmental challenges, the decolonization process has recently stalled. Nevertheless, the Decolonization Unit is effectively carrying out its core functions in support of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Special Committee members are generally satisfied with the quality and timeliness of the Unit's work, and have welcomed recent initiatives taken by the Unit to enhance the support provided. Among the Unit's primary outputs are the 16 working papers on the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, which were produced on time in 2006 but for which questions exist regarding their utility and content. The Unit has provided effective

* E/AC.51/2007/1.

07-28943 (E) 080507

substantive advice to the Special Committee, including support for its regional seminars, but could strengthen its work in preparing information products on decolonization. The Unit's structure and management are generally sound, although it lacks a good knowledge management system and guidelines documenting its work, and recent steps taken to further integrate the Unit within the Department of Political Affairs have been successful and should be continued. Lastly, the separation of support functions for the Special Committee is not optimal.

OIOS recommends that the Decolonization Unit and the Department of Political Affairs:

- Establish a comprehensive knowledge management system;
- Develop clear and precise guidelines for all of its work products and process;
- Explore, in consultation with the Special Committee, consolidation of the Unit's mandated reporting into fewer documents;
- Explore ways to further integrate the Decolonization Unit with the rest of the Department;
- In consultation with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, develop an action plan for better coordinating support to the Special Committee with its secretariat.

The Division for Palestinian Rights is effectively supporting the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, although a peaceful settlement to the question of Palestine is yet to be achieved. Committee members are highly satisfied with the Division, giving good ratings to the quality and timeliness of its work, and to staff knowledge and responsiveness. The Division's implementation of its work programme, while generally successful, is somewhat uneven. It provides strong secretariat services to the Committee, and fully carries out its programme of international meetings and conferences. The United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), while largely successful, could be improved, as could the Division's work with regard to publications and information sharing and cooperation with civil society. A more innovative approach to the Division's work could be taken, in consultation with the Committee, and more systematic feedback could be obtained on its work products. Opportunities exist to strengthen the Division's internal management, and further integration of the Division with the Department of Political Affairs, through temporary staff rotations, would enhance efficiencies and staff morale.

OIOS recommends that the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Political Affairs:

- Assist the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in developing a strategy for further enhancing the content of international meetings and conferences;
- Conduct regular and systematic user surveys for the Committee's international meetings and conferences and UNISPAL, as well as follow-up to its annual training programme for Palestinian Authority staff;
- Develop a strategy for strengthening its cooperation with civil society organizations;

- Undertake a change management exercise to strengthen internal management practices, enhance Division synergies and raise staff morale;
- Consider ways to further integrate the Division with the rest of the Department of Political Affairs.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs.[1] The political affairs programme is implemented by the Department of Political Affairs. It is divided into the following five subprogrammes:

(a) Subprogramme 1, Prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, implemented by four Regional Divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas and Europe, and Asia and the Pacific);

(b) Subprogramme 2, Electoral assistance, implemented by the Electoral Assistance Division;

(c) Subprogramme 3, Security Council affairs, implemented by the Security Council Affairs Division;

(d) Subprogramme 4, Decolonization, implemented by the Decolonization Unit;

(e) Subprogramme 5, Question of Palestine, implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

2. OIOS presented a report on subprogramme 1 to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006 (E/AC.51/2006/4). OIOS is presenting reports on the remaining four subprogrammes, a summary report and a report on special political missions administered and supported by the Department of Political Affairs to the Committee at its forty-seventh session in 2007. The present report covers subprogramme 4, Decolonization, and subprogramme 5, Question of Palestine. It has been reviewed by the relevant departments and their comments appear in italics as appropriate.

3. The purpose of the in-depth evaluation is to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Department of Political Affairs in relation to its objectives under subprogramme 4 and it focuses on the structure, activities and products of both the Decolonization Unit, responsible for implementing subprogramme 4, and the Division for Palestinian Rights, responsible for implementing subprogramme 5.

II. Methodology

4. In conducting the present evaluation, OIOS utilized a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, including self-administered surveys, in-person in-depth interviews, programme data analyses, direct observation and literature review. The evaluation findings on decolonization are based on the following 11 data sources: (a) a self-administered survey of all 27 members of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;[2] (b) three interviews with the

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), paras. 382 and 383. See also General Assembly resolution 59/275, para. 22.

[2] The survey was conducted from June to July 2006. A total of 8 members responded, for a 30 per cent response rate.

Committee Bureau;[3] (c) a self-administered survey of staff of the Decolonization Unit;[4] (d) five interviews with all Decolonization Unit staff; (e) three interviews with the internal United Nations partners of the Decolonization Unit; (f) six interviews with the Decolonization Unit's internal partners within the Department of Political Affairs; (g) four interviews with representatives of the four administering Powers of the Non-Self-Governing Territories; (h) analysis of Special Committee resolutions from 2003 to 2006; (i) observations of Special Committee and Fourth Committee meetings;[5] (j) programme data analyses, including a review of the Decolonization Unit's working papers on the Non-Self-Governing Territories; and (k) a literature review.

5. The evaluation findings on the question of Palestine are based on the following 12 data sources: (a) a self-administered survey of all 22 members and 25 observers of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;[6] (b) four interviews with the Committee Bureau;[7] (c) a self-administered survey of staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights;[8] (d) eight interviews with Professional staff of the Division; (e) a self-administered survey of the Division's internal United Nations partners;[9] (f) a self-administered survey of members of the International Coordinating Network of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine;[10] (g) four interviews with the Division's internal Department of Political Affairs partners; (h) analysis of Committee resolutions and work programmes from 2003 to 2006; (i) observations of Committee meetings;[11] (j) analyses of UNISPAL and the *Daily Focus*; (k) programme data analyses, including reviews of internal Division workplans and guidelines; and (l) a literature review.

6. These methodologies have several limitations. Measurement of the impact of the Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights relies to some extent on the impact of the committees they serve. However, an assessment of the respective committees is beyond the mandate and scope of OIOS and of the present evaluation. The Decolonization Unit evaluation is limited by the low response rate for the Special Committee survey. The Division for Palestinian Rights evaluation is limited by low response rates for the surveys of Committee members, United Nations partners and the non-governmental organization coordinating network.

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[3] Interviews were held with the Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen.

[4] The survey was conducted from June to August 2006. During this time, one staff person was leaving and a new one arriving, so 4 of 5 staff members responded, for an 80 per cent response rate.

[5] OIOS observed Special Committee meetings from 5 to 7 June and on 12, 14 and 22 June 2006. OIOS observed Fourth Committee meetings from 2 to 6 October and on 11 and 12 October 2006.

[6] The survey was conducted from June to July 2006. A total of 18 members and observers responded (10 members and 8 observers), for a 38 per cent response rate.

[7] Interviews were held with the Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur.

[8] The survey was conducted from June to July 2006. All 15 staff members responded, for a 100 per cent response rate.

[9] The survey was conducted from June to July 2006. Twelve of 34 partners responded, for a 35 per cent response rate.

[10] The survey was conducted from June to July 2006. Six of 21 members responded, for a 29 per cent response rate. This will be called the "non-governmental organization survey" in the present report.

[11] OIOS observed Committee meetings on 22 May, 19 July and 4 October 2006.

III. Background

Subprogramme 4 on decolonization

7. The Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 1654 (XVI) of 27 November 1961. The Special Committee's mandate is to examine the application of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and to make recommendations on progress and the extent of the Declaration's implementation. It is entrusted to "pursue its efforts in bringing a speedy end to colonialism",[12] in accordance with Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration. The Special Committee currently has 27 members, with a Bureau consisting of a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and one Rapporteur. It meets annually in June and reports to the General Assembly through the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

8. There are currently 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the United Nations list. These are: New Caledonia, Tokelau, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, Saint Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands, American Samoa, Guam, United States Virgin Islands and Western Sahara. They are administered by one of four administering Powers: the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and New Zealand.

9. The Decolonization Unit is the Secretariat entity mandated to provide substantive support to the Special Committee and the General Assembly in carrying out their decolonization mandates and in making progress in the decolonization process (see A/60/6 (Sect. 3)). It does so through substantive support activities and political advice. The Unit consists of five staff members — three Professional and two General Service — and is led by a Unit Head who reports to the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs through one of the Department's Assistant Secretaries-General. The Secretary of the Special Committee is located in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

Subprogramme 5 on the question of Palestine

10. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly in resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975. The mandate of the Committee is to recommend a programme enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX). The Committee currently has 22 members and 26 observers, with a Bureau consisting of a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and one Rapporteur. The Committee meets periodically throughout the year.

11. The Division for Palestinian Rights is the Secretariat body mandated to support the Committee in generating heightened international awareness of the

[12] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 23* (A/61/23), para. 69.

question of Palestine, as well as international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (see A/60/6 (Sect. 3)). It does this through substantive and Secretariat support activities. The Division consists of 16 staff members — 10 Professionals and 6 General Service — and is headed by a Division Chief who reports to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs through one of the Department's Assistant Secretaries-General. The Division has three teams: (a) secretariat of the Committee, (b) monitoring, research, studies and publications and (c) international meetings and civil society cooperation.

IV. Evaluation findings

Part 1. Decolonization Unit

A. The Decolonization Unit is effectively carrying out its core functions, but challenges remain to the decolonization process

Question of decolonization

12. The issue of decolonization is complex. Since the inception of the United Nations, over 80 former colonies have gained independence. In the past decade, the decolonization process has stalled and currently 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories remain on the United Nations list.[13] These Territories pose a unique set of challenges. As reported in the Special Committee's 2006 report to the General Assembly, the Territories "suffer handicaps arising from the interplay of such factors as size, remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragility of ecosystems, constraints in transport and communications, great distances from market centres, a highly limited internal market, lack of natural resources and vulnerability to drug trafficking, money-laundering and other illegal activities".[14] In its resolution 1541 (XV), the General Assembly established three options for self-determination: emergence as a sovereign independent State, free association with an independent State, or integration with an independent State. In its resolution 2625 (XXV), the Assembly stated that: "the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitutes [a mode] of implementing the right of self-determination by that people".

13. Several impediments hamper the decolonization process. First, the current self-determination options may not be viable for all Territories given the challenges noted above. Furthermore, decolonization is no longer at the forefront of the Organization's priorities, as other issues have taken on greater urgency.[15] Cooperation between the administering Powers and the Special Committee is required, and administering Powers have had different views on decolonization; some believe that the United Nations has no role with regard to their Territories. Therefore, as confirmed by interviews and surveys of Special Committee members,

[13] East Timor was the most recent Territory to achieve independence, in 2002.

[14] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 23* (A/61/23), para. 76.

[15] This was noted by Special Committee members, Decolonization Unit staff and other stakeholders.

Unit staff, and other stakeholders, new and innovative approaches are required to develop practical solutions for self-determination.

14. The February 2006 Tokelau referendum is a positive example of good cooperation between the Territory, the Special Committee, the administering Power and the United Nations. It is generally acknowledged that the openness of New Zealand to United Nations involvement was key to the success of that process. While the required two-thirds majority vote to move towards self-government in free association with New Zealand was not achieved, another vote is scheduled for 2007. During the Special Committee meeting on 22 June 2006, the Ulu and Administrator of Tokelau noted with appreciation the work of the United Nations, including the contribution of the Unit.[16]

Contribution of the Decolonization Unit

15. The mandate of the Decolonization Unit emanates from an annual General Assembly resolution on the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which reaffirms General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and all other resolutions and decisions on decolonization. In its resolution 61/130, the Assembly requested the Special Committee to continue to seek suitable means for the immediate and full implementation of the Declaration and, establishing the mandate of the Unit, requested the Secretary-General to provide the Special Committee with the facilities and services required for the implementation of the resolution, as well as other resolutions and decisions on decolonization adopted by the Assembly and Special Committee. Decolonization Unit staff rate the mandate as clear and relevant, but question the likelihood of its full implementation in the near future. The same assessment is generally made by the Unit's colleagues in the Department of Political Affairs and other United Nations partners.

16. The subprogramme 4 objective "to promote the decolonization process in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly for the 16 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories so as to bring about the complete eradication of colonialism" has essentially remained constant over the past three bienniums.[17] The expected accomplishment of the Decolonization Unit in 2006-2007 in support of this objective is that "The Special Committee and the General Assembly will be able to carry out their decolonization mandates and make progress in the decolonization process of the 16 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories".[18] The Unit's sole indicator of achievement for 2006-2007 is that "at least 95 per cent of parliamentary documents are submitted within deadlines".[18] In the view of OIOS and the Decolonization Unit, this does not sufficiently measure the Unit's effectiveness. A stronger indicator would incorporate some assessment of these documents' relevance, quality and utility.

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[16] The Ulu is the Head of Tokelau.

[17] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (A/59/6/Rev.1 and Corr.1). The objective "to strengthen the dissemination of information on decolonization ... and to ensure the provision of assistance by the specialized agencies and institutions" (See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (A/57/6/Rev.1 and Corr.1)) was dropped in 2006-2007.

[18] A/60/6 (Sect. 3), table 3.19.

17. An assessment of the Unit's effectiveness is largely based on its contribution to the successful functioning of the Special Committee and on how well it fulfils its support role in assisting the Special Committee to achieve its objectives. This support is grouped into three categories: (a) production of 16 working papers on the Territories and other reports; (b) substantive (including political) advice to the Special Committee, its seminars and missions, and to the General Assembly; and (c) maintenance of the United Nations website on decolonization and preparation of information materials in collaboration with the Department of Public Information. These core functions facilitate the work of the Special Committee, which in 2006 considered 12 resolutions and one decision that were adopted by the General Assembly.

18. Special Committee members are satisfied overall with all three types of Decolonization Unit support. Most rate the overall quality and timeliness of the Unit's work positively. Unit staff additionally receive high ratings, with all respondents claiming the working relationship between the Unit and the Special Committee is excellent or good, and most rating staff responsiveness, knowledge and availability highly.

19. Within the parameters of its mandate, the Unit has recently been more proactive. For example, it has suggested that new text in the 16 working papers be bolded so as to facilitate their review by Special Committee members. In preparing the report of the Pacific Regional Seminar held in Fiji in 2006, it was agreed to reduce the overall length (from 80 paragraphs in the previous report to 40 in the current) and have a more topical conclusion. Reduction in the report's length was partially brought about by the Unit. OIOS encourages the continuation of innovations such as these, in consultation with Special Committee members, to strengthen the Unit's support.

Working papers on the 16 Territories and other reports

20. The primary way the Decolonization Unit supports the Special Committee is through the annual production of 16 working papers on the Non-Self-Governing Territories. As measured by time spent on its various activities, these papers constitute the Unit's main output.[19] In 2006, all 16 working papers were produced on time. They require coordination and collaboration with the Unit's internal Department of Political Affairs partners, specifically with desk officers assigned to the same geographic region in which the Territory is located, and such coordination generally works well. For example, a desk officer in the Africa II Regional Division typically reviews the working paper on Western Sahara.

21. Given the subprogramme objective, the working papers should facilitate dialogue and contribute to analysis of the decolonization process, but different views exist with regard to their content. While a majority of Special Committee survey respondents rate these papers highly, some mention that the papers could be more analytical, and a few raise questions about the adequacy of sources used. According to Unit staff, primary information sources include the Internet, media, academic journals and various public databases. Several Special Committee survey respondents also note that the papers are largely repetitive from one year to the next.

[19] In 2004-2005, monitoring, researching, analysing and drafting the working papers accounted for 73 per cent of the total of Unit work months, and on the staff survey, staff report that drafting the papers took 30 per cent of their time, on average, annually.

Furthermore, interviews reveal that the papers are not typically read in detail by Special Committee members, casting some question over the extent to which they are used as meaningful working tools by the Committee in its deliberations.[20] According to administering Powers, the working papers are not always accurate and do not typically identify sources; some add that they do not receive ample time to provide input in the reports' preparations. [21]

22. OIOS analysed working papers for four different Territories from 2003 to 2006, revealing little variation overall in the documents from one year to the next, including in paper length, titles of main sections and background information.[22] The reports have limited analysis and no clear methodology for corroborating and validating data sources. There is greater variation, however, between papers covering different Territories; some have special sections relevant to the particular issues and social and economic environment of the Territory being discussed.

23. Given the concerns noted above, and in order to make the 16 working papers more relevant, OIOS believes consideration could be given to consolidating the papers into fewer documents, grouping the Territories either by their respective regions or by administering Power. Consolidation of the papers would facilitate more analysis of cross-cutting and thematic decolonization issues and further contribute to deliberations and decision-making among Member States.

24. Special Committee survey respondents rate other reports prepared by the Unit highly. The Unit takes the lead on four mandated reports on: (a) information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter; (b) training for inhabitants of the Territories; (c) implementation by United Nations specialized agencies and international institutions; and (d) dissemination of information.[23] These reports do not require independent data collection or analysis, are relatively short in length and are essentially the same in structure and content from one year to the next.[24] Therefore, OIOS believes that it may be more efficient to integrate and consolidate the reports into fewer documents. For example, the report on information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter and the report on dissemination of information on decolonization might be combined into one report dealing with information issues related to decolonization.

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[20] OIOS acknowledges that this may not be due solely to the papers' quality.

[21] Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations requests the administering Powers to "transmit regularly to the Secretary-General for information purposes ... statistical and other information of a technical nature relating to the economic, social, and educational conditions in the Territories for which they are respectively responsible".

[22] A total of 16 working papers were reviewed.

[23] The 2006 reports are: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations (A/61/70); Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/61/66); Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (A/61/62); and Dissemination of information on decolonization during the period from June 2005 to March 2006 (A/AC.109/2006/18).

[24] A note verbale is generally sent to relevant entities requesting information for inclusion in the report.

Substantive advice to the Special Committee and General Assembly

25. Most Special Committee member survey respondents are satisfied with the direct support the Decolonization Unit provides, and say its substantive advice is excellent or good. During Committee meetings, OIOS observed an active and ongoing dialogue between the Chairman and other Bureau members and Unit staff, particularly the Unit head, who appeared engaged in the proceedings of the Committee. The Unit also provided political advice to the Fourth Committee during its October 2006 session. For example, it was called upon to provide background and explanation regarding past practice and precedent on a particular issue, and assisted with revising the text of a resolution that had been unacceptable to some delegations.

26. Most Special Committee survey respondents rate support provided to the regional seminars highly. The Unit assists with the annual seminars by identifying potential speakers and topics and by helping the Bureau draft the seminar report. The seminars offer the opportunity to explore the challenges around self-determination; the recent seminar, held in Fiji in November 2006, saw an exchange of information between inhabitants of the Territories and Special Committee members.

Decolonization information materials and decolonization website

27. Half of Special Committee survey respondents rate the Unit's work in preparing information products on decolonization as only fair. The Unit cooperates with the Department of Public Information on preparing these materials, and the Department of Public Information staff describe a good partnership in which the Unit provides decolonization expertise and the Department of Public Information provides marketing expertise. The Unit is taking steps to further inform inhabitants of the Territories about their self-determination options and disseminate decolonization information; for example, it worked with the Department of Public Information to develop a brochure discussing decolonization. With regard to the decolonization website, all Special Committee survey respondents say that the Unit does a good job, and the Unit is currently working on revitalizing the website to make it more user-friendly; it has done a demonstration of the website and will continue to seek feedback from its principal clients. The Unit does not, however, conduct any user feedback surveys of its website, nor of the information materials produced, which would assist in identifying ways in which to improve its work.

Unit staffing, structure and management

28. The internal structure of the Decolonization Unit, including staffing levels and task allocation are sound, but raise issues for consideration. The Decolonization Unit has three Professional posts at the D-1 (Unit head), P-5 and P-4 levels. It is worth noting that there are no junior-level Professional staff. The Unit also has two General Service staff, resulting in a high ratio of General Service to Professional staff.[25] There is a clear delineation between the two General Service staff — one is a research assistant and the other provides administrative and secretarial assistance to Professional staff. The 16 working papers are divided among the three

[25] This is above the average Secretariat ratio of 1.36 General Service posts to each Professional post proposed for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (Introduction), para. 22).

Professional staff, although OIOS did not note a significant difference between the work of the P-4 and P-5 staff. The current division of labour seems reasonable, given that the Chief drafts working papers for the more challenging and complex Territories and edits all 16 papers. With regard to staff attendance at Special Committee meetings, OIOS questions the need for nearly all five Unit staff to be present at most Special Committee and Fourth Committee meetings. Based on OIOS observations, it is not clear what some staff members do during the meetings.

29. Based on staff surveys and interviews, the Unit's internal management has improved over the past two years and staff are generally positive about management. Staff agree overall that human resources are well managed, that workloads are fairly distributed, that internal communication is good, that management is consultative and that both good and poor performance are adequately managed. No internal personnel or work issues are identified by staff as particularly problematic.

30. Internal management can be strengthened with regard to guidelines and knowledge management. Not all staff report being adequately trained when joining the Unit. Efficiency would be further served by the development of clear guidelines documenting the Unit's internal work processes, which are currently lacking. As discussed in paragraphs 31 to 33, the institutional memory on Special Committee precedent, protocol and procedure resides primarily with the Special Committee Secretary, with no systems currently in place to capture, store and transfer this expert knowledge. Significant risk exists, therefore, that expertise will be lost if staff members leave, given the absence of systems for capturing knowledge about both Special Committee and decolonization matters.

B. Separation of support functions for the Special Committee is not optimal

31. The separation of support functions for the Special Committee is not always efficient. As noted in paragraph 9 above, secretariat support is provided by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and substantive support is provided by the Unit, although the Department of Political Affairs has been designated the focal point for matters relating to decolonization.[26] OIOS acknowledges that this split in secretariat and substantive servicing is not unique to decolonization but part of a larger organizational structure intended to increase efficiency of technical secretariat support of intergovernmental bodies. *The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management does not agree with the statement that separation of support functions has hampered efficiency. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management also argues that its own experience amply proves that separation of substantive and technical secretariat servicing was useful and beneficial to all parties concerned.*

[26] The functions of providing both substantive and secretariat services did not leave the Department of Political Affairs until 1997 and had been carried out by the Decolonization Unit in the Department of Political Affairs' General Assembly Subsidiary Organs Branch. It was only in 1997 that the responsibility for secretariat service was transferred to the newly formed Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, which was created as a result of Secretariat restructuring. In his letter dated 24 October 1997, addressed to the Special Committee Chairman, the Secretary-General stated that " I have decide that the substantive responsibilities for the decolonization programme will be maintained in the Department of Political Affairs, which will remain the focal point for matters relating to decolonization" (A/52/521).

32. While the Special Committee has been able to successfully carry out its work programme, there are several ways in which separating the functions is not optimal. First, staff from both support offices are generally present at all Special Committee meetings and it is not always clear why both are needed.[27] Second, as noted in paragraph 30, there is limited transfer of knowledge and expertise between the two functions. The Secretariat is the main knowledge source on Special Committee procedures, protocol and precedent, and the Unit is the main knowledge source on the history and political, social and economic environments of the Territories, but there are no systems in place to integrate this knowledge. *The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management states that there is a certain limit as to how the substantive and technical secretariat support could be integrated into one entity without sacrificing efficiency and the need to share and preserve institutional memory.* Lastly, the division of tasks and responsibilities is not consistently clear or efficient, and there has never been a formal document on the division of labour.[28] For example, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management handles all logistical arrangements for the regional seminars, but the Decolonization Unit prepares notes and advises the Special Committee on the substantive matters being discussed. Other divided tasks include the preparation of Special Committee documentation.[29]

33. Special Committee members point to some confusion about the split between the two functions.[30] They state that roles and responsibilities between the two are not consistently clear and stress the need for enhanced communication between them. One member refers to the "convoluted" division of labour between the two functions and admits to sometimes "being at a loss" regarding to whom queries should be addressed.

34. OIOS observed several instances during Special Committee meetings where roles and responsibilities between the Committee Secretary and the Unit head were not clear. During one meeting, the Chairman turned to both the Secretary and the Unit head with the same request for information, and it was unclear who would take the lead in responding. In other instances, Bureau members conferred with Unit staff on various matters and the Secretary appeared to play a more minor role in the proceedings. For queries and points pertaining to Committee protocol, the Secretary, consistent with his role and the existing division of labour, took the lead in responding.

35. The Decolonization Unit takes more of a lead during Fourth Committee meetings at which decolonization issues are considered during the first week of October. In October 2006, the Secretary was typically not at the podium, while Unit

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[27] The presence of the Special Committee Secretary and his staff is mandatory, as the Secretary provides procedural advice and organizes logistical and technical servicing. Each Department for General Assembly and Conference Management staff performs specific functions.

[28] Department for General Assembly and Conference Management staff state that division of labour has evolved over time and that their modus operandi is outlined in section 7 of the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2005/9.

[29] The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is a clearing house for all Special Committee documents, except for the 16 working papers and other mandated reports.

[30] The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management points out that the confusion could be addressed through orientation for new delegates at the beginning of each new General Assembly session.

staff were, and they played a substantive role.[31] For example, the Chairman asked the Unit for a special brief on one of the Territories in order to facilitate his understanding of the relevant issues.

36. Administering Powers report relying on the Unit as the main focal point in the Secretariat on decolonization matters, and all four question the value of having dual functions in different departments. One representative mentions needing some time to fully understand the division of labour when first assuming responsibility for decolonization. Another states that it can be problematic when it is unclear whom to call when questions arise.

C. Steps towards greater integration of the Unit within the Department of Political Affairs should continue to be strengthened

37. Unit staff do not have equal demands on their time throughout the year, and opportunities therefore exist for greater integration of the Unit within the Department of Political Affairs. The Unit's work is highly cyclical, being based primarily on the drafting of the 16 working papers undertaken during the first five months of the calendar year, the provision of substantive support to the Special Committee and its Bureau and the redesign of the decolonization website. Steps have been taken to more efficiently utilize staff time. In 2006, Unit staff undertook work assignments in the Americas and Europe Division and in the Asia and Pacific Division during their less busy periods. The opening of the General Assembly is a busy one for the Regional Divisions, and it is during this time that Unit staff are most available to assist. Additionally, staff of the Regional Divisions assisted with the drafting of the Unit's working papers. This work arrangement has resulted in enhanced integration of the Unit with the Department of Political Affairs by mainstreaming decolonization issues and making optimal use of staff resources, and has facilitated the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise among Department staff.

38. Unit staff and their Department of Political Affairs colleagues welcome the opportunity for greater integration of their work. Both speak to the need for greater fluidity between the different functions of the Department and for greater staff mobility. Furthermore, given the Unit's historical isolation from the rest of the Department and limited professional development opportunities for its staff, staff rotations have resulted in higher morale and more efficient management. One Unit staff member states that staff in the Unit should be rotated, shared and moved in and out of the Regional Divisions to ensure the best use of resources and the mainstreaming of the issues.

39. OIOS supports this initiative and concludes that greater efficiencies for the Unit and the Department of Political Affairs can be achieved by continuing to better integrate staff resources within the Department. The results of steps taken to date have been positive, and appear not to have had a negative impact on the capacity of the Unit to meet its primary mandate of support to the Special Committee.

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[31] According to established practice, secretaries of all subsidiary bodies that report to the General Assembly need not be present during presentation and consideration of reports. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management notes that during the previous Fourth Committee sessions, the need did not arise for the Special Committee Secretary to be present.

Part 2. Division for Palestinian Rights

A. The Division for Palestinian Rights is effectively supporting the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, but a peaceful settlement to the question of Palestine is yet to be achieved

Question of Palestine

40. The question of Palestine remains at the forefront of United Nations priorities, with continuing conflict and the lack of a permanent solution. The General Assembly continues to reaffirm the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine until satisfactorily resolved in accordance with international law, and considers the issue annually during its regular session; furthermore, the Security Council receives monthly Secretariat briefing reports.[32] Throughout 2006, the peace process has remained stalled. In his report on the Middle East to the Security Council dated 11 December 2006 (S/2006/956, para. 3) the Secretary-General stated that failure to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the long-festering Arab-Israeli conflict remained the major underlying source of frustration and instability in the region.

41. The General Assembly maintains that a permanent settlement should enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, defined as the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property (resolution 3236 (XXIX)). The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, established with the mandate to promote these collective rights through heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine, and to support the Middle East peace process and mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people, follows a very regular work schedule each year. Its mandate is renewed annually by the General Assembly, usually in early December, when the Committee submits to the Assembly four resolutions under the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine". At its opening session for a given calendar year (usually February), the Committee adopts the programme of work. Around October of the same year, the Committee submits its annual report to the General Assembly.[33]

Contribution of Division for Palestinian Rights

42. The Division's mandate emanates from an annual General Assembly resolution entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat", in the most recent of which the Assembly "requests the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work ... in particular, the organization of international meetings and conferences ..., the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine and the provision of the

[32] The Secretary-General is a principal member of the Quartet, which consists of representatives of the United States of America, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations.

[33] For the most recent report, see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/61/35), covering October 2005 to October 2006.

annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority" (resolution 61/23). Division staff generally view their mandate as relevant and clear, but a few question its feasibility.

43. The Division's mandate is both restrictive and relatively flexible. It is restrictive in that it stipulates the specific components of the Division's programme of work. It is flexible in that it does not prescribe specific activities for all work areas or quantify benchmarks and goals.[34] OIOS believes that in implementing its mandate, the Division has some latitude in how it interprets its support role in order to most effectively meet its client needs and support objectives of the Committee. This would normally be done in consultation with the Committee.

44. The subprogramme 5 objective "to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights" (see A/60/6 (Sect. 3)) has remained constant over the past three bienniums. The expected accomplishment of the Division in 2006/07 is that "through the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Committee ... will generate heightened international awareness of the question of Palestine, as well as international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" (ibid.).[35] The three indicators for 2006/07 are: (a) a sustained level of dialogue, engagement and support on the part of the international community for the programme's objectives (measured by the number of adopted General Assembly resolutions on the question of Palestine); (b) an increased number of civil society organizations accredited to the Committee; and (c) an increased number of pages viewed on the United Nations website on the question of Palestine. While formally approved, in the view of OIOS, the indicators do not sufficiently measure the effectiveness of the Division for Palestinian Rights and address only some but not all work programme components.[36] The indicators could be strengthened if they included some assessment of how their achievement contributed to heightened international awareness and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

45. An assessment of the effectiveness of the Division for Palestinian Rights is largely based on its contribution to the successful functioning of the Committee and on how well the Division fulfils its support role in assisting the Committee to achieve its objectives. Its effectiveness must further be benchmarked against the programme of work mandated annually through the General Assembly resolution entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat" (most recently, resolution 61/23). The Division's support is grouped into six categories: (a) provision of secretariat services to the Committee; (b) organization of a programme of international meetings and conferences; (c) development and maintenance of UNISPAL; (d) preparation and dissemination of publications and information materials; (e) liaison and coordination with civil society on the question of Palestine; and (f) other activities, including implementation of an annual training

[34] The Division states that its activities are also based on past practice and established protocol and format. The Division has been open to proposing new ways of carrying out its mandate, in consultation with the Committee.

[35] The latter part of the expected accomplishment on "peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" was added in 2006/07.

[36] OIOS notes that the indicators have emerged as acceptable performance measures in the context of results based budgeting. The Division for Palestinian Rights intends to continue refining the indicators, including exploring additional performance metrics for UNISPAL.

programme for Palestinian Authority staff. These functions facilitate the work of the Committee, which in 2006 submitted four resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

46. Over the past five years, the Committee has been able to carry out in full its mandated programme of work with the Division's support. In its report to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, the Committee emphasized the essential contribution of the Division in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.[37] Client satisfaction with the Division is high. Committee survey respondents rate the overall quality of Division support highly, and assess the working relationship between the Division and the Committee positively. Division staff are also given high marks; their responsiveness, knowledge and availability are consistently rated highly. One respondent states that the staff of the Division are very professional, qualified and well-informed and are highly dedicated to their work in support of the Committee.

B. The Division's implementation of its work programme, while generally successful, is somewhat uneven

Secretariat services

47. Providing secretariat support to the Committee is seen as a core function of the Division by both staff and Committee members. It includes drafting notes and statements for the Chairman and Rapporteur for meetings of the Committee, the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as preparation for Bureau meetings. However, this activity's high priority is not reflected in the relative time spent on it, given that the Committee meets as needed and does not have a regular session of meetings and that it takes up a smaller proportion of staff time in relation to the Division's other activities.[38] In 2004/05, based on data from the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System, substantive servicing of meetings comprised 19 per cent of total work months. In the staff survey, staff report spending, on average, only 7 per cent of their time annually on servicing the Committee and its Bureau, and only 3 per cent of their time on supporting the Committee in intergovernmental meetings, such as Security Council meetings.[39] According to staff, drafting documents for/of the Committee takes an average of 17 per cent of their time each year.

48. Committee member survey respondents say the Division's secretariat services are of high quality. Interviews with Committee Bureau members reveal that Division managers do an effective job in supporting Bureau meetings and that they have a close working relationship; one states that the Bureau is comfortable with allowing the Secretariat to make its points and in helping the Bureau to "think aloud" regarding the issues it faces. OIOS observed the smooth functioning of several Committee meetings but notes that there was little if any interaction and consultation between Division staff and Committee members. These meetings were for the most part closely scripted.

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[37] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/61/35), para. 80.

[38] In 2006, the Committee met 7 times at Headquarters and the Committee Bureau met 12 times.

[39] OIOS notes that these percentages are based on an average of all staff in the Division. OIOS further notes that these percentages are based on staff's self-reported information and were not independently verified, and therefore may present an inaccurate estimate in certain cases.

International meetings and conferences

49. Four international meetings and conferences on the question of Palestine were held in 2006, as established in the Committee's programme of work.[40] The Committee "considers that its programme of international meetings and conferences facilitates discussion and analysis of the various aspects of the question of Palestine" and that they "contribute to raising international awareness".[41] In the staff survey, Division staff report spending 22 per cent of their time on average, each year, on meetings and conferences, which makes it one of the most time-intensive of the Division's activities. The Division plays a key role in meeting logistics, including arranging conference facilities, handling travel arrangements for Committee members, and ensuring that meetings are conducted efficiently. The Division has checklists and guidelines, and is well organized in its preparatory work. On a substantive level, the Division secures participation of appropriate speakers and develops, under the Committee's guidance, the draft agenda.[42] However, some staff mention that the approach to planning the substance of the meetings is essentially unchanged in recent years, and that a more innovative approach could enhance the impact of the meetings in further facilitating open and transparent dialogue on the question of Palestine.

50. Some stakeholder feedback on the international meetings and conferences is generally positive. The Division is rated very highly by Committee survey respondents for its support to this part of their programme, and the Division's partners give the Division good ratings. Staff also believe that the Division is effective in this regard, and non-governmental organization survey respondents report that the Division effectively organizes these meetings.

51. OIOS believes that a credible and independent assessment of the meetings' outcomes and impact is needed to determine how effectively they contribute to the organizational goals of heightened international awareness of the question of Palestine and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people. The Division does not obtain systematic and regular participant feedback. OIOS notes that the Committee has not requested such surveys, but that the Division could conduct these in cooperation with the Committee, and the results could be used to further strengthen the organization, content and outcome of the meetings. Data on numbers and types of participants, while reported to the Committee by the Chairman, are not aggregated or centrally maintained, making participation trend analysis difficult to conduct.

United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

52. The Division has been largely successful in its management of UNISPAL. This activity encompasses a relatively large proportion of the Division's resources; staff report spending 21 per cent of their time on average on UNISPAL each year. The UNISPAL mandate was established by the General Assembly in its resolution

[40] These are: (a) United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (15 and 16 December); (b) United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People (7 and 8 September); (c) United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (27 and 28 June); and (d) United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People (26 and 27 April).

[41] A/AC.183/2006/CRP.1, para. 19.

[42] The political substance of the meetings is determined by the Committee.

46/74 B in 1991 and, since 1993, the Division has worked to create an electronic facility that contains, in full text, all significant United Nations documents relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine. UNISPAL includes relevant United Nations documents and external source documents — currently over 18,000 documents total. The Division maintains some usage data; web hits have increased from an average of 400 daily hits in 1998 (UNISPAL has been accessible through the Internet since late 1997), to 21,000 hits in 2005 and up to 25,000 hits in the first half of 2006. Web hits, however, are not an entirely satisfactory performance measure for UNISPAL, since they do not determine actual number of users, how long they stay on the site, what they use it for, and whether the information was helpful; nor do web hits illustrate UNISPAL contribution to heightened international awareness of the question of Palestine and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people.[43]

53. Feedback on UNISPAL is generally high. All Committee survey respondents rate the Division's work in maintaining and updating UNISPAL as excellent or good; Committee Bureau members say UNISPAL is an important, relevant and useful part of the Division's work. Division staff cite UNISPAL as a major success and the Division's partners rate UNISPAL highly. It is worth noting, however, that the Division does not make any effort to systematically measure user needs and feedback, such as through regular user surveys.[44]

54. An OIOS review of UNISPAL found positive features but also identified areas for improvement.[45] UNISPAL is generally accessible, subject areas covered in the system are grouped into more than 100 categories, and the search function provides many options and supports advanced search, although the search functions do tend to be slow. Additionally, the site's organization is not entirely clear from the front page and is relatively complex, and most documents and multimedia clips are available only in English.[46]

Publications and information

55. The Division's work on publications and information-sharing could be strengthened. Publications produced regularly include annual compilations of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and reports of Committee meetings and conferences, which are generally assessed highly by Committee survey respondents. Enhancing the Division's potential for information-sharing was the most common suggestion by Committee member respondents for strengthening the Division's work. The expectation of an enhanced information-sharing role within the Organization was also mentioned by Committee Bureau interviewees, one

[43] The Division has been exploring improved measurements for UNISPAL usage.

[44] The Division notes that a UNISPAL user survey could be more a reflection of users' political views than an assessment of the site itself.

[45] This review was conducted in May 2006 using standard website review criteria, such as those noted in "Criteria for evaluation of Internet Information resources", Alastair Smith, Victoria University of Wellington, Department of Library and Information Studies, New Zealand, and "Evaluating Web Sites", Debra DeRuyver, Jennifer Evans, James Melzer, and Emma Wilmer, 30 April 2000, www.publichistory.org.

[46] OIOS notes that steps have been taken to address these concerns, such as the recent introduction of a simplified Google-based search function, and that the Division plans to continue its work to improve the user-friendliness of UNISPAL. Also, the Division plans to look into making UNISPAL more multilingual.

of whom suggests that the Division plays a larger role in providing information on the question of Palestine, given that it has become a repository of knowledge and experience on this topic. OIOS notes that any efforts to strengthen the Division's information-sharing role must be strategic, with clearly defined objectives and target audiences.

56. One major information product undertaken is the Division's *Daily Focus*, which is prepared daily and provides a summary of recent events in the region. The limited distribution of this bulletin, however, detracts from its potential as a source of information in the Organization; a more strategic dissemination, in concurrence with the Committee, could ensure that it contributes to the organizational goals of heightened international awareness of the question of Palestine and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.[47] OIOS reviewed these bulletins during one week in October and determined that while they provided a good source of information, opportunities existed for improvement. The bulletins averaged 2 to 3 pages, with a wide range of items per review (from 5 to 20). However, the lack of an internal structure to the document, with no logical order of the paragraphs, as well as the lack of any summary, made some of the information confusing and limited its utility. Individual events were reported without any context, and the precision of information varied.[48] Furthermore, the reader could not consistently obtain a sense of the number and type of the information sources used.

Cooperation with civil society

57. The Division also supports the Committee in implementing its programme of cooperation with civil society, but has not consistently achieved the goals established in the internal Division workplan for this component of its work programme. These goals include identifying and encouraging accredited civil society organizations to share with the Committee their insights and reports from the ground and promoting a regular exchange of information with the non-governmental organization community on current and planned activities.[49]

58. OIOS notes limitations with regard to the Division's work with civil society organizations, although the number of accredited non-governmental organizations has been increasing over the past three years and that there are currently approximately 800 accredited non-governmental organizations.[50] There are no internal benchmarks for assessing yearly targets and goals for increased accreditation.[51] Also, the Division's database of accredited civil society organizations is not reliably up to date, as OIOS noted several examples of inaccurate or missing contact information. Furthermore, other than established

[47] Current distribution is restricted to Committee members and observers, select Department of Political Affairs colleagues, some officials of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and a few colleagues in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Division is currently considering how to broaden dissemination.

[48] For example, only in some cases was the precise date of an event reported.

[49] Internal workplan of the International Meetings and Civil Society Cooperation Team, Division for Palestinian Rights, 31 March 2006.

[50] Twelve new non-governmental organizations were accredited in 2003, 13 in 2004, 17 in 2005 and 6 in 2006.

[51] Division staff say that they do not actively solicit new applications for accreditation.

accreditation criteria, which have been used for several years, the Division does not undertake any additional activities to vet non-governmental organizations applying for accreditation. Lastly, other than annual conferences, there are few other systems in place to facilitate the regular exchange of insights and ideas between civil society and the Committee, although at least once a year the Committee holds a day of formal consultations with most active non-governmental organizations and Committee members and Division staff meet with visiting non-governmental organizations.

59. Committee member survey respondents, while generally rating the Division's work with civil society positively, rate this activity lower in comparison to other Division activities. Non-governmental organization survey respondents note that Division staff are not consistently responsive or timely in their assistance, and a few say that the Division does not adequately consult with non-governmental organizations or have a good working relationship with civil society. Some suggest that the Division should play a stronger role in coordinating civil society organizations.[52] One good example of the Division's work in facilitating information sharing between non-governmental organizations is the biweekly *NGO Action News*, a newsletter reporting on activities and initiatives of civil society groups; most non-governmental organization survey respondents rate this newsletter positively. It reports on individual non-governmental organizations and their past or planned activities, but does not summarize any of the information by region or topic, which could make the bulletin more reader-friendly and useful.

Other activities

60. The Division undertakes other mandated activities that staff report take up only a relatively small proportion of their time.[53] These include organization and implementation of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which in 2006 was held on 29 November. This day is politically important for the Committee, and it is organized by the Committee secretariat. In 2006, the Division prepared and organized a special high-level meeting of the Committee, organized an exhibit and film screening and Chairman's reception and coordinated with the United Offices at Geneva and Vienna for parallel observances. Furthermore, the Division organized the 2006 training programme for two Palestinian Authority staff. This two-month programme included meetings with Secretariat officials and representatives of other United Nations system entities, attendance of the General Assembly, its subsidiary bodies and the Security Council, and other events. The training programme objective is to provide eligible staff of the Palestinian Authority with in-depth knowledge of the work of the United Nations, its legal foundations, rules and regulations, the functioning of its main organs and major items on their respective agendas, with a special focus on the origins and evolution of the consideration of the question of Palestine.[54] However, OIOS notes that without any systematic follow-up, including follow-up with Palestinian Authority staff to

[52] OIOS notes that it is not the Division's task to coordinate activities of non-governmental organizations.

[53] As self-reported on the staff survey, staff report spending only 5 per cent of their time on average in the planning and implementation of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and 3 per cent of their time in contributing to the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority annually.

[54] "2006 Training Programme for Staff of the Palestinian Authority" programme outline, 26 July 2006.

determine the usefulness of the activities they engaged in, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the training or improve future training programmes.[55]

C. Opportunities exist for strengthening Division management

61. The Division's organizational structure is basically sound. There are 16 Professional posts in the Division, constant over the past five years. The Division is divided into three teams: (a) secretariat of the Committee; (b) monitoring, research, studies and publications, including UNISPAL; and (c) international meetings and civil society cooperation. Each team has three Professional posts. Consisting of the three teams, each with respective tasks and responsibilities, this structure represents a rational division of labour, and staff generally concur with this assessment on the staff survey. However, given the proportionately lower time staff report spending on secretariat and substantive servicing of Committee meetings, it is questionable why three full-time Professional staff are needed for the secretariat team. There are cross-cutting activities that all Division staff participate in, such as preparation of the *Daily Focus*. However, in interviews, some staff say that boundaries between teams result in a lack of synergies and staff development opportunities within the Division. There is a proposal to create Division manuals and staff guides on its various activities and work processes.

62. Based on the staff survey and interviews, a few concerns exist with regard to management practices. Staff morale is rated as high by only 2 of 15 staff survey respondents; 10 rate it average and 2 rate it low or very low. In the staff survey and in interviews, some staff raised concerns about what they perceived to be the inequitable allocation of tasks, lack of consultative decision-making and responsiveness to staff concerns, and the need for stronger human resource management. In interviews, some staff stated that there was limited opportunity for innovation, since they had essentially been doing the same activities in the same manner for many years, and that this has resulted in a lack of creativity; one staff member stated that the Division's work tended towards a "cookie-cutter" approach. Internal communication could also be strengthened. One third of staff survey respondents rate internal lines of communication within the Division as only fair and one rates it as poor, and staff from some teams report not being aware of what is happening in other teams, despite monthly Division staff meetings. OIOS concludes that performance and results would improve with stronger management practices.

D. Greater integration of the Division within the Department of Political Affairs would further enhance efficiencies

63. Overall Division efficiencies, achieved after many years of fulfilling the same core tasks, might create opportunities for greater utilization of Division staff in the work of the Department of Political Affairs. Given that staff agree they are adequately resourced to fulfil their work programme, and that the Committee has been able to fully carry out its mandated programme of work, this should not detract from the Division's effectiveness. Opportunities exist for enhanced integration with the Department, which has the potential to enhance information and knowledge-sharing and facilitate greater efficiencies not only within the Division but also within the Department. Given the Division's distinct General Assembly mandate within the Department, further integration need not be structural but rather functional. This would also address the concern raised by several staff that they feel

[55] Division staff state that they have received ad hoc feedback that has been useful to planning future training sessions.

somewhat isolated from the rest of the Department and have limited opportunities for professional development and skills enhancement; they also state that the Division is not well integrated with the Department.

64. Limited Division staff mobility is of particular concern given new staff mobility requirements for the Secretariat and staff assertions that the Division lacks innovation in its work. The average number of years staff have been with the Division is 13; they have been on their current post an average of 8 years. Some staff state that this had led to a certain lack of creativity and initiative within the Division (see para. 61). The ad hoc rotation of Division staff, on a temporary and/or cyclical basis, to other parts of the Department of Political Affairs may help to address this concern, although it should not jeopardize the delivery of mandated outputs in support of the Committee's programme of work.[56] OIOS notes that the Division's Professional staff are Political Affairs Officers, with the same skill sets and competencies as their Department of Political Affairs colleagues.

V. Conclusion

65. The Decolonization Unit has effectively carried out its core functions in providing substantive support to the Special Committee, whose members are generally satisfied with the Unit's work and have been receptive to recent work innovations. However, several challenges have stalled further progress towards self-determination, which limits what the Unit can do in the decolonization process. The Unit's working papers on the 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories and other mandated reports have been produced on time, but with some questions concerning the content of the latter. Internal Unit management has been strengthened, but knowledge management is poor, including the lack of written guidelines and procedures for the Unit's work. Separation of Special Committee secretariat and support functions has led to some inefficiencies that must be addressed. Further efficiencies could be achieved by continuing to more fully integrate the Unit within the Department of Political Affairs, as initial steps taken in this regard have proven successful.

66. The Division for Palestinian Rights has effectively served the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and, through its support, the Committee has been able to fully carry out its mandated programme of work, as evidenced by Committee member satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of the Division's work. Nevertheless, the question of Palestine remains yet to be resolved. The Division successfully carries out its mandated work programme, although some components are stronger than others. OIOS believes that, in consultation with the Committee, the Division can take a more innovative approach to implementing its work programme in order to enhance its effectiveness. Internally, staff concerns regarding management practices and communication must be addressed, including the sense of isolation from the rest of the Department that many staff report hampers their work and morale. This can be addressed by exploring further opportunities for integrating the Division within the Department of Political Affairs, primarily through temporary and/or cyclical staff assignments to other offices of the Department, recognizing that this should not detract from the Division's capacity to meet its mandate to support the Committee.

[56] OIOS notes that two Division for Palestinian Rights staff have had temporary work assignments in other parts of the Department of Political Affairs.

VI. Recommendations

67. Based on the evaluation findings, OIOS makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (Decolonization)

68. **The Decolonization Unit should establish a formal knowledge management system for capturing, storing, retrieving, sharing and integrating knowledge within the Unit** (see part 1, finding A). This system should enhance work efficiency and ensure the sustainability of the Unit's knowledge, including:

(a) A strategy articulating specific knowledge management objectives;

(b) Knowledge-sharing tools for achieving these objectives, including common work databases;

(c) Mechanisms for integrating tools into everyday work processes;

(d) Systems to capture the knowledge on Special Committee precedents and protocols that currently resides with the Committee's secretariat function, and a strategy for more effectively integrating this with the Unit's substantive knowledge.

Recommendation 2 (Decolonization)

69. **The Decolonization Unit should develop clear and precise guidelines for all of its work products and processes, including supporting Special Committee meetings, preparing the 16 working papers and other mandated reports, and working with the Department of Public Information on the decolonization website and decolonization information materials** (see part 1, finding A).

Recommendation 3 (Decolonization)

70. **In consultation with the Special Committee, the Decolonization Unit should continue its efforts to improve the quality and scope of the 16 working papers, including by exploring with the Special Committee alternative forms of presentation** (see part 1, finding A). For the 16 working papers, one option includes grouping the papers by region or by administering power. The other four mandated reports might also be grouped by subject matter.

Recommendation 4 (Decolonization)

71. **The Department of Political Affairs should explore ways in which to further integrate the work of the Decolonization Unit with that of the rest of the Department, inter alia, with regard to enhancing information-sharing and cross-cutting synergies** (see part 1, finding C). There are several options for achieving this, including staff rotations and fuller integration of the Decolonization Unit with the Regional Divisions. Any steps taken must ensure that the Special Committee receives the support needed to fully implement its work programme.

Recommendation 5 (Decolonization)

72. **The Department of Political Affairs, in consultation with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, should develop an action plan for better coordinating support to the Special Committee and improving information-sharing and communication between the secretariat and**

substantive support functions. This plan should also address the need to document the institutional memory of Special Committee precedent and procedure that currently exists with the Special Committee secretariat (see part 1, finding B).

Recommendation 6 (question of Palestine)

73. **The Division for Palestinian Rights should assist the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in developing a strategy for enhancing the content of international meetings and conferences** (see part 2, finding B). This should include identifying a wider range of participants, enhancing the range of topics discussed and ensuring that meetings are better geared towards the organizational goals of heightened international awareness and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

Recommendation 7 (question of Palestine)

74. **The Division for Palestinian Rights should conduct regular and systematic user feedback surveys for its international meetings and conferences and for UNISPAL, in order to improve these components of its work programme.** It should also systematically follow up on its training programme for Palestinian Authority staff, in order to determine the usefulness and impact of the training activities it organizes (see part 2, finding B).

Recommendation 8 (question of Palestine)

75. **The Division for Palestinian Rights should develop a strategy for strengthening its cooperation with civil society organizations** (see part 2, finding B). It should identify specific activities and tools that will be used to strengthen coordination and communication among non-governmental organizations, provide more forums for the exchange of views between civil society and the Palestinian Rights Committee, and create greater awareness regarding the work of civil society organizations on the question of Palestine.

Recommendation 9 (question of Palestine)

76. **The Division for Palestinian Rights should undertake a change management exercise with a view towards strengthening Division synergies, enhancing staff morale, improving Division-level communication and addressing staff concerns regarding internal management practices discussed in the present report** (see part 2, finding C).

Recommendation 10 (question of Palestine)

77. **The Department of Political Affairs should consider ways to further integrate the Division with the rest of the Department, with regard to enhancing information-sharing and strengthening synergies and efficiencies within the Department** (see part 2, finding D). Any steps taken must ensure that the Committee receives the support needed to fully implement its work programme.

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

27 March 2007